

PUBLIC

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11 October 2007

UA 260/07 Fear for safety / Death threats

MEXICO      Gonzalo Dominguez Monroy (m)    ]  
                 Felipe Ramos Cruz (m)            ] journalists  
                 Carlos Dominguez Monroy (m)    ]  
                 And others working for *El Imparcial del Istmo* newspaper in Oaxaca

Killed:        Mateo Cortés Martínez (m), press worker  
                 Flor Vásquez López (f), press worker  
                 Agustín López Nolasco (m), press worker

Journalists for *El Imparcial del Istmo*, a regional newspaper based in Salina Cruz, in eastern Oaxaca state, have been receiving death threats, apparently as a result of the newspaper's coverage of a drug-trafficking gang's activities in the state. After three of their colleagues were shot dead earlier this week, Amnesty International is deeply concerned for the safety of other workers at the same newspaper.

Shortly after 1pm on 8 October, employees of *El Imparcial del Istmo*, van driver Mateo Cortés Martínez and delivery and sale workers Flor Vásquez López and Agustín López Nolasco, had just collected a batch of newspapers from the city of Tehuantepec and were travelling in a van identifiable by the newspaper's logo. They were intercepted by a group of men armed with high calibre guns in a SUV vehicle with tinted windows. The three press workers were shot repeatedly at close range. The attack is believed to be in retaliation for the newspaper's coverage of executions and abductions reportedly carried out by the Mexican drug trafficking gang, *Los Zetas*.

Shortly after the murders, newspaper director Gonzalo Dominguez Monroy, and reporters Felipe Ramos Cruz and Carlos Dominguez Monroy reportedly received anonymous telephone death threats. A male voice told Gonzalo Dominguez Monroy "we warn you, you're next" (*te lo advertimos, el proximo eres tu*). His colleagues received similar calls.

They and other press workers at the same newspaper had reportedly been receiving death threats by phone, email and letter since they started publishing news on criminal activities attributed to drug-related organised crime six months ago. The death threats have reportedly intensified over the last month.

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The escalation of attacks against journalists in the last two years has turned Mexico into one of the most dangerous countries in the world for journalists. The majority of the most serious attacks are attributed to organized crime networks seeking to silence reporting on violence and corruption. Media workers have suffered attacks and threats, including in Oaxaca state, see UA 227/06, AMR 41/050/2006, 31 October August 2006, UA 151/07, AMR 41/026/2007, 15 June 2007, and UA 208/07, 9 August 2007.

The federal authorities established the Office of Special Prosecutor on Crimes against Journalists (*Fiscalía Especial para la Atención de Delitos Cometidos contra Periodistas*) in February 2006 to improve investigation of such cases. However, the Special Prosecutor does not have jurisdiction to investigate directly in the majority of cases. Of the 100 case files opened there has not reportedly been a single successful prosecution of the perpetrators. The almost total impunity for crimes against media workers means that journalists are working in an increasingly dangerous climate with ever greater pressure not to

report on potentially dangerous issues. Amnesty International has called for the powers of the Special Prosecutor on Crimes against Journalists to be extended in order to investigate these crimes directly.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Spanish or your own language:**

- expressing concern at the murder of press workers Mateo Cortés Martínez, Flor Vásquez López and Agustín López Nolasco on 8 October 2007 near Tehuantepec;
- expressing concern that their colleagues Gonzalo Dominguez Monroy, and reporters Felipe Ramos Cruz and Carlos Dominguez Monroy, as well as other workers at *El Imparcial del Istmo*, have received death threats;
- calling on the authorities to ensure that Gonzalo Dominguez Monroy, Felipe Ramos Cruz and Carlos Dominguez Monroy receive protection measures to guarantee their safety in accordance with their wishes;
- calling for a full, prompt and impartial investigation by the federal authorities, such as the Special Prosecutor on Crimes against Journalists, into the killing of Mateo Cortés Martínez, Flor Vásquez López and Agustín López Nolasco and death threats against Gonzalo Dominguez Monroy, Felipe Ramos Cruz and Carlos Dominguez Monroy;
- reminding the authorities of their duty to ensure those responsible for attacks on media workers are held to account in order to prevent future attacks and create a climate in which journalists can exercise their right to freedom of expression without fear of reprisal.

**APPEALS TO:**

Special Federal Prosecutor on Crimes against Journalists

Lic. Octavio Alberto Orellana Wiarco

Fiscal Especial para la Atención de Delitos Cometidos contra Periodistas

Procuraduría General de la República

Av. Paseo de la Reforma #211-213

Col. Cuauhtémoc, Del. Cuauhtémoc, C.P. 06500, México D.F., MEXICO

**Fax: +52 55 53 46 09 08**

**Salutation: Dear Sir/Señor Fiscal Especial**

Governor of Oaxaca

Lic. Ulises Ruiz Ortiz

Gobernador del Estado de Oaxaca

Carretera Oaxaca-Puerto Angel, Km. 9.5, Santa María Coyotepec, Oaxaca, Oaxaca C. P. 71254, MEXICO

**Fax: +52 951 502 0530 (if a voice answers, ask "tono de fax, por favor")**

**E-mail: gobernador@oaxaca.gob.mx**

**Salutation: Señor Gobernador/Dear Governor**

Attorney General of Oaxaca

Lic. Evencio Nicolás Martínez Ramírez

Procurador del Estado de Oaxaca

Avenida Luis Echeverría s/n, Col. La Experimental, San Antonio de la Cal, Oaxaca, Oaxaca 71236, MEXICO

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**Salutation: Dear Attorney General/Estimado Procurador**

**COPIES TO:**

President of the National Human Rights Commission

Dr. José Luis Soberanes Fernández

Presidente de la Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos (CNDH)

Periférico Sur 3469, 5º piso, Col. San Jerónimo Lídice, México D.F. 10200, MEXICO

and to diplomatic representatives of Mexico accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 22 November 2007.